



# CALIFORNIA STORIES



## Table of Contents

Letter from the Executive Director 3

Reading *The Grapes of Wrath* 4

Communities Speak 6

California Documentary Project 8

California Story Fund 10

Supporters 14

Board of Directors 17

Financials 18





An abstract collage of various colors and textures, including green, yellow, orange, and purple. It features several small, overlapping photographs of people, some of which are partially obscured by the colorful layers. The overall effect is a rich, textured background that suggests a collection of diverse stories and experiences.

## Why are stories so important?

In 2001 the California Council for the Humanities imagined a statewide initiative that would use the power of personal stories to connect Californians and further our mission of strengthening California communities. That initiative, California Stories, is now bringing together thousands of people to share stories and find common ground for addressing communitywide issues.

In these pages we report on the four programs conducted during the first three years of California Stories: Reading *The Grapes of Wrath*, Communities Speak, the California Documentary Project and the California Story Fund. Together these programs are providing a rich narrative of contemporary California and laying the groundwork for community action around shared issues of concern.

The opportunity to share stories is particularly important here in California, the most highly diverse state in the United States and home to the greatest number of immigrants of any state. Today approximately half of California residents were born elsewhere, with foreign-born immigrants and their children making up more than one-quarter of the state's population.

The diversity of California is one of its greatest strengths — and also its greatest challenge. How do people from different cultures and backgrounds connect to one another and the place where they live? How do we solve the problems we face if we don't come together?

What we have found is that when people tell their stories and others listen, a trust develops that can change community dynamics. In fact, story-sharing is often the spark that prompts people to work together to find solutions to some of today's most pressing concerns.

These pages offer you a glimpse of what California Stories has accomplished so far. The stories we are uncovering are providing us not only with insight into where we've been, but also inspiration for where we are going.

JAMES QUAY  
Executive Director

Unprecedented statewide  
reading and story-sharing program  
draws large audiences

# reading the grapes

The inaugural campaign of California Stories, Reading *The Grapes of Wrath*, engaged thousands of Californians in reading John Steinbeck's novel about California migrants and exploring its relevance to today's California. The months of October and November 2002 were packed with more than 800 events around the state, from book discussions and film series to live performances and poetry slams. Book discussions took place in six languages other than English, including Arabic, Vietnamese and Korean.

In Los Angeles, L.A. Theatre Works produced a weeklong run of Frank Galati's Tony Award-winning play *The Grapes of Wrath*. In Fresno, people turned out at a Krispy Kreme doughnut shop to participate in a 24-hour read-a-thon of the novel, and in San Francisco, Studs Terkel appeared in a special CCH-sponsored evening of conversation

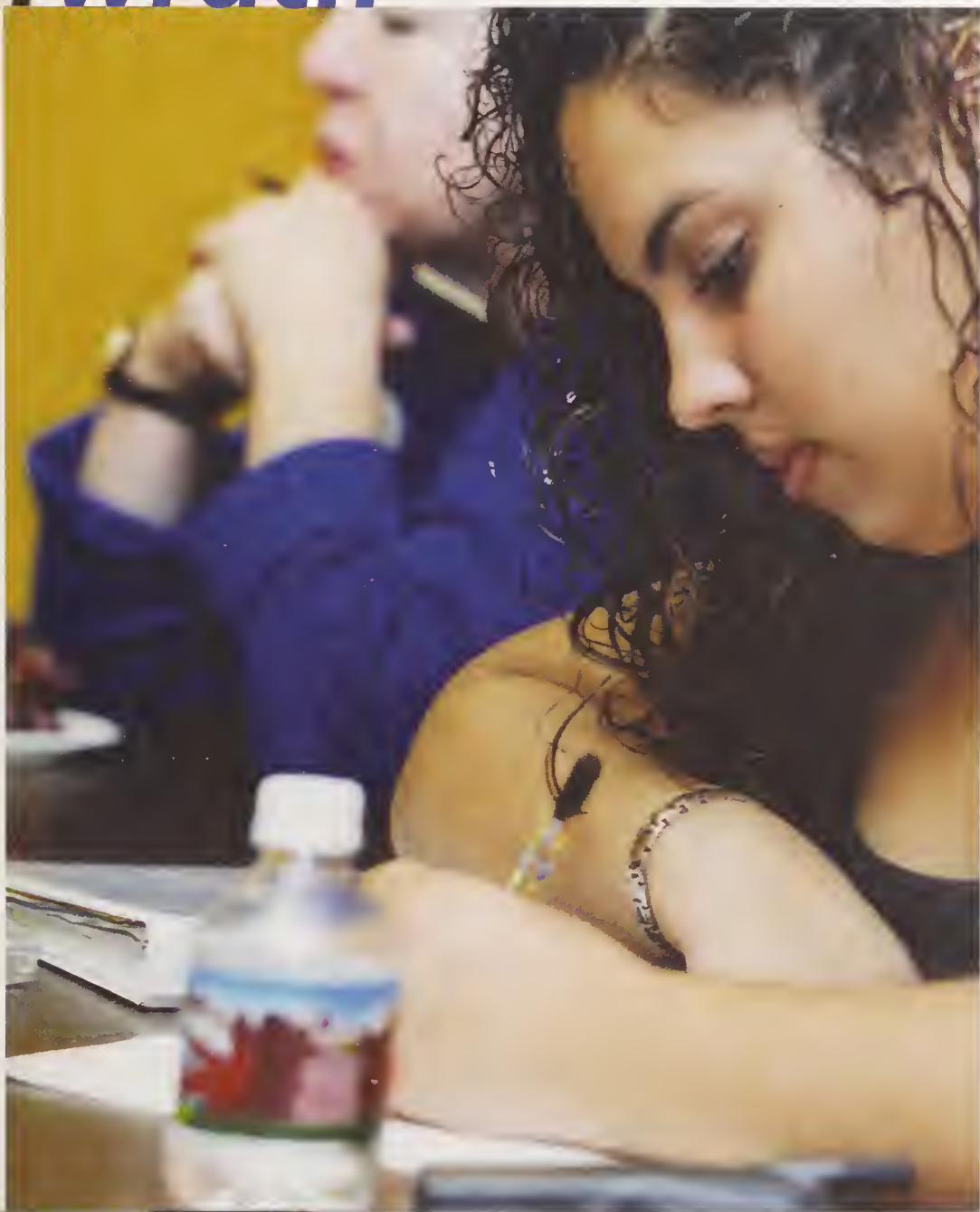
with writer Calvin Trillin. A number of prominent individuals supported the program, including Maria Shriver, Rob Reiner, Rita Wilson, Sharon Davis, U.S. Sens. Barbara Boxer and Dianne Feinstein, and 24 congressional representatives.

The campaign garnered extensive press coverage and generated interest statewide. For the first time since it was published, more than 60 years ago, *The Grapes of Wrath* reached the bestseller list in California, and Penguin Books, an early program supporter, was prompted to issue the first Spanish-language edition of the novel for the U.S. market.





# ofwrath



Above: CSU Fresno student Diana Godnez works on a poem during "Grapes of Write," an afternoon of poetry readings and writing workshops at Artes Americas, the major Latino arts center in Fresno.

Left: The Fresno County Library's *Grapes of Wrath* read-a-thon at a local Krispy Kreme attracted enthusiastic Steinbeck fans.

Far left: Jeffrey Donovan and Shirley Knight starred in a special L.A. Theatre Works production of Frank Galati's *The Grapes of Wrath* to benefit CCH.





Communities Speak, the Council's largest and most far-reaching program under California Stories, consists of eight groundbreaking projects that use story to address critical community issues. Communities Speak builds on the success of our seven Community Heritage projects, funded by the Council in 1999. Those projects, which spanned the state and brought people together to tell and listen to stories, sparked community dialogue about such important issues as ethnic relations, land use and community identity.

# communitiesspeak



With Communities Speak, the Council intensified its efforts to use story to make communities stronger by supporting two- to three-year projects that use story to achieve fundamental change. Communities Speak projects, which are now under way and will continue until 2005, address a wide range of issues.

In South Los Angeles, "From Generation to Generation: Making a Life in South Los Angeles, 1940-2005" is collecting stories from several generations of African American, Asian American and Latino residents with the aim of enabling people to find common ground for action. "The area is viewed as crime-ridden and drug-infested," said Project

Addressing issues and inspiring change



**Far left:** "Guadalupe Speaks" is using a variety of story-based activities to help revitalize the town of Guadalupe, in economic decline for several decades. Here families gather on Main Street as part of an earlier project.



**Above top:** Jesús Suarez del Solar, one of the first U.S. casualties of the Iraq War, is featured in *Un Soldado Mexicano*, a video produced by at-risk youths as part of the "Tu Voz" Communities Speak project.

**Above bottom:** Jesús' father, Fernando, now an outspoken opponent of the war in Iraq, talked to young "Tu Voz" filmmakers about his son's life.

Director Alexis Moreno, "but people in South L.A. have a long history of banding together to address concerns. We hope that the stories will inspire residents to realize that they can make a difference the same way an earlier generation did."

In the Inland Empire, the "Living on the Dime" project is using story to explore the impact of the I-10 freeway on people's lives. "Typically, freeways go through ethnically diverse, heavily populated areas where people are least able to speak out," Project Director Robert Gonzales said. "'Living on the Dime' will give those people a voice."

And in Stockton, "When We Were Young: The Experiences of Stocktonians Across Three Generations" is gathering intergenerational coming-of-age stories from 11 of

the city's ethnic groups. The aim of the project is to strengthen intergenerational ties and foster understanding across and between cultures.

Projects are also taking place in Marin County, the San Diego-Tijuana border region, San Francisco, Guadalupe and San Diego. Among the many issues those projects address are affordable housing, urban gentrification and migrant life.

So far, we see encouraging evidence that these projects are bringing people together in new ways and increasing people's sense of community. As they continue to unfold, we anticipate that they will have an even greater impact on community life.

# california documentary project

Using film, video, photography and radio to document California life

The California Documentary Project supports film, video, radio and photography projects that use story to directly address issues of concern to Californians. The Council has always viewed documentaries as important vehicles for bringing compelling stories to light and over the years has supported many important films, including 12 Academy Award nominees. They include *The Weather Underground*, nominated for best documentary feature in 2003, and the 1989 Academy Award winner *Common Threads: Stories from the Quilt*.

The California Documentary Project differs from the Council's past efforts in its singular focus on California issues. The idea is to encourage filmmakers, videographers, photographers and radio producers to document contemporary California life, much as Dorothea Lange and John Steinbeck recorded the Dust Bowl era.

Among the Documentary Project films funded so far are *Los Angeles Now*, a 90-minute exploration of a rapidly changing Los Angeles, and *Juvies*, a moving portrait of juvenile offenders tried and sentenced in adult court. *Juvies* filmmaker Leslie Neale hopes that her

film will cause people to take a second look at the juvenile justice system in California. "Kids are being trapped in long prison sentences — with no chance of rehabilitation," Neale said. "The question we need to examine is the ultimate cost to society of what we're doing to juvenile offenders."

The photography projects include one in the Central Valley documenting the lives of Mexican migrant women and another in San Francisco focusing on people who live in San Francisco's single-room-occupancy hotels, as seen by hotel residents themselves. In radio, "The Boomtown Chronicles" is examining how families on the central coast are coping with the sweeping changes to the economy and landscape wrought by the ups and downs of the Silicon Valley high-tech industry.

By virtue of the power of documentaries to reach and inspire a wide audience, the Council hopes that these projects will lead to greater understanding of the issues facing the state and stimulate discussions among California's diverse groups about how to shape our common future.







**Far left and at right:**

Arrested at 15, Liz is serving 11 years in a California state prison. She is one of the juvenile offenders featured in *Juvies*, a California Documentary Project film examining California's juvenile justice system.

**Immediate left:** Filmmaker Philip Rodriguez on location during the filming of *L.A. Now*, a California Documentary Project film exploring the transformation of Los Angeles from a mostly Anglo city to one of the most diverse urban centers in the country.





# the californiastoryfund Small stories

The California Story Fund is reaching into communities throughout the state to fund small projects that expand our understanding of California. These projects are typically completed in a few months.

Stories are being gathered from Californians of many backgrounds, ethnicities, ages and economic levels and are then presented to the public through photographs, forums and dramatic presentations.

The stories tell us many things. We are learning about the plight of day laborers in San Francisco, the experiences of three generations of Mexican American women in San Diego, what it's like to be a teenager growing up in California, the hardships of migrant life in the Central Valley and how former female prison inmates are adjusting to life outside the walls.

And people are getting a chance to hear stories from those they wouldn't

normally encounter. African American kids in Oakland and Mien women from the mountains of Laos are exchanging stories about their history and culture. And a multiethnic group of kids in San Jose is learning about the internment of Japanese Americans during World War II from Jack Matsuoka, a well-known cartoonist interned when he was just 16.

These stories are changing our view of California and giving us a sense that, despite our differences, we have much in common and have much to gain by acting with others to make California flourish.

**At right:** The once-thriving Chinese American community in Oxnard (now being documented by a California Story Fund project) included the Soo Hoo family, seen here in a photograph from the 1920s. In 1966 Bill Soo Hoo, right, became the town's mayor, the first mayor of Chinese descent in California.

**Far right:** How Indian dance styles are being transmitted to a new generation of dancers is chronicled by a California Story Fund project on the history of Indian dance in California.





es with a big impact

**At left:** A California Story Fund project in the coastal region of central California brought attention to a long-neglected river and watershed, and strengthened community efforts to preserve these vital resources for future generations.





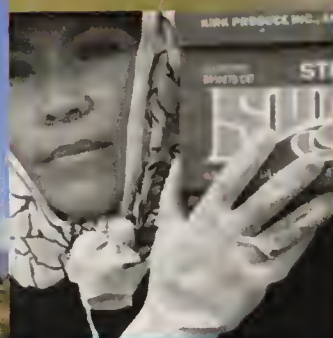


Koreatown in Los Angeles, as seen in the California Documentary Project film *Los Angeles Now*.

What does the construction of freeways do to communities? A Communities Speak project in the Inland Empire is using stories to address this issue.

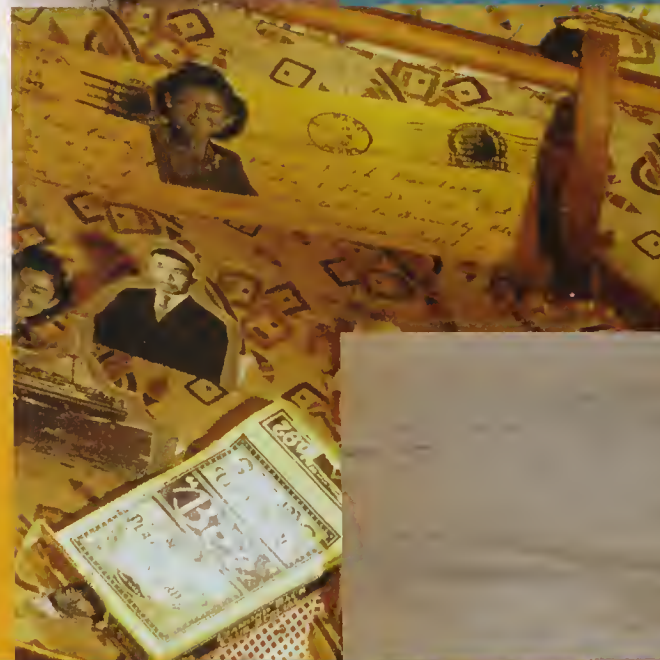
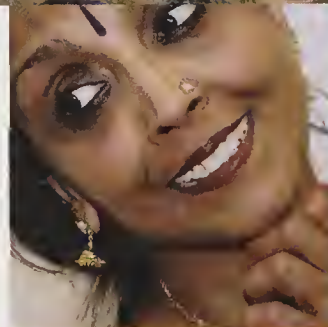


Claudia and Susie, Wilson High School, East Los Angeles, participants in a California Documentary Project on Latino youth.



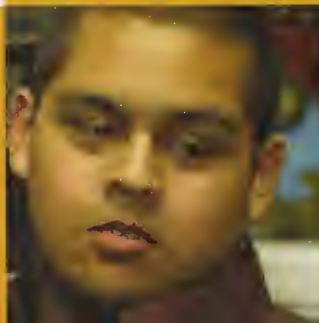
Field worker in Guadalupe the setting for the project "Guadalupe Speaks."

Viji Prakash, an Indian dance pioneer, contributed her story to a project on the history of Indian dance in California.



Artist Flo Oy Wong uses suitcases to illustrate the stories of six World War II camp survivors in the CCH-supported exhibit "1942: Luggage from Home to Camp."

Jose Espinoza, a participant in a "Tu Voz" Communities Speak project, works with other youths on a video about changes in his community.



Lawrence Collins learns video-production skills in a special camp sponsored by "I Am OMI," a San Francisco-based Communities Speak project.





Do cultural programs that bring people together to share stories make a difference in the life of communities? The programs of California Stories are providing an answer to that question. Story-sharing is bringing people together in new ways, and conversations are beginning. We believe that this coming together — through story — may enable us to move beyond our differences and begin the work of making our communities more livable for this and the next generation.



*Romantico*, a California documentary project film, follows two Mexican musicians as they try to make a living in San Francisco restaurants.



Teenagers gather to listen to labor music of the 1930s as part of a Reading *The Grapes of Wrath* program in the San Diego area.



The rhythmic tapping of feet is a vital element in the North Indian classical dance form called Kathak, now flourishing in California because of the work of a handful of Indian dance pioneers. Their legacy is documented in the California Story Fund project "Shaping California: Immigrant Dancers and Their Voices."



Charles Abernathy, from a California Story Fund exhibit on residents of a single-room-occupancy hotel in San Francisco.

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| Nancy Hatamiya<br>Principal Consultant,<br>California State Assembly<br>Member Wilma Chan,<br>Sacramento                              | Patricia O'Brien<br>Executive Dean,<br>UCLA College                                                                                     |                                                                                                                                                                |



# financials

| STATEMENT OF FINANCIAL POSITION            | 2003         | 2002         | 2001         |
|--------------------------------------------|--------------|--------------|--------------|
| ASSETS                                     |              |              |              |
| Current assets                             | \$ 1,647,637 | \$ 1,543,131 | \$ 827,057   |
| Fixed assets                               | 45,003       | 84,265       | 30,626       |
| Total assets                               | 1,692,640    | 1,627,396    | 857,683      |
| LIABILITIES AND NET ASSETS                 |              |              |              |
| Current liabilities                        | 949,697      | 714,262      | 501,485      |
| Net assets                                 | 742,943      | 913,134      | 356,198      |
| Total liabilities and net assets           | \$ 1,692,640 | \$ 1,627,396 | \$ 857,683   |
| STATEMENT OF REVENUE, SUPPORT AND EXPENSES | 2003         | 2002         | 2001         |
| REVENUE AND SUPPORT                        |              |              |              |
| National Endowment for the Humanities      | \$ 1,514,850 | \$ 1,640,787 | \$ 1,532,262 |
| Contributions                              | 727,701      | 1,425,274    | 458,792      |
| Other income                               | 15,319       | 65,496       | 36,404       |
| Total revenue and support                  | 2,257,870    | 3,131,557    | 2,027,458    |
| EXPENSES                                   |              |              |              |
| Program expenses                           |              |              |              |
| Program services                           | 730,315      | 1,315,876    | 1,012,005    |
| Grants                                     | 906,169      | 389,112      | 536,271      |
| Total program expenses                     | 1,636,484    | 1,704,988    | 1,548,276    |
| Management and general                     | 625,009      | 414,210      | 417,395      |
| Fundraising                                | 166,568      | 136,787      | 102,734      |
| Total expenses                             | 2,428,061    | 2,255,985    | 2,068,405    |
| Increase (decrease) in net assets          | (\$ 170,191) | \$ 875,572   | (\$ 40,947)  |
| Net assets                                 | \$ 742,943   | \$ 913,134   | \$ 356,198   |

A full audit report issued by Cote & Company is available upon request. Please contact the California Council for the Humanities' San Francisco office.



The mission of the California Council for the Humanities is to enrich California's cultural life and to strengthen communities through public use of the humanities. The Council is an independent, not-for-profit state affiliate of the National Endowment for the Humanities supported through a public-private partnership that includes funds from the National Endowment for the Humanities, private foundations and corporations. The Council also receives essential support from individuals.

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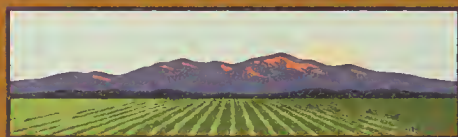
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